

Global Precipitation Measurement Mission

Using NASA Earth-observing Satellites to Help Improve Agriculture and Water Usage 3rd grade

“Water for Wheaties?” Lesson Plan

Lesson Overview:

Students will learn about Earth’s freshwater resources and how NASA’s Earth observing satellites are helping us better understand Earth’s water. They will work in small “expert groups” to explore growing wheat, the differences in weather and climate in two wheat farming regions of the world, Pakistan and Kansas, and the scarcity of freshwater resources in Pakistan. Using this information, students will get into “teams” and work with NASA data from the GPM (Global Precipitation Measurement) mission to explore the amount of precipitation that has fallen in these two regions over the past two decades. They will make recommendations for how farmers in Pakistan could reduce their water usage based on the work that is being done by Faisal Hossain. Finally, they will consider ways they can reduce their use of freshwater resources in their own lives.

Time Required: This lesson can take from three to four 45-minute class periods, depending on how in depth the teacher decides to get into the data analysis part of the lesson.

NGSS:

The performance expectations in third grade help students formulate answers to questions such as: *“What is typical weather in different parts of the world and during different times of the year? How can the impact of weather-related hazards be reduced? What happens to organisms when their environment changes?”*

3-LS4-4. Make a claim about the merit of a solution to a problem caused when the environment changes and the types of plants and animals that live there may change.

3-ESS2-1. Represent data in tables and graphical displays to describe typical weather conditions expected during a particular season. [Clarification Statement: Examples of data could include average temperature, precipitation, and wind direction.]

3-ESS2-2. Obtain and combine information to describe climates in different regions of the world.

3-ESS3-1. Make a claim about the merit of a design solution that reduces the impacts of a weather-related hazard.

3-5-ETS1-2. Generate and compare multiple possible solutions to a problem based on how well each is likely to meet the criteria and constraints of the problem.

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Background Information:

NASA has many Earth observing satellites that are studying Earth's systems. You can learn more about these missions [here](#). The [GPM](#) (Global Precipitation Measurement) mission is a NASA mission that is measuring Earth's precipitation around the world. The data from this mission is being used in a wide variety of ways, from helping weather forecasters better predict hurricanes to responding to natural disasters to improving health around the world. In this lesson, we will focus on how GPM data are being used by Faisal Hossain to help wheat farmers reduce their use of precious freshwater resources. They will learn about the work he does as a Professor of Civil and Environmental Engineering, and learn more about his STEM-related career.

Materials:

Engage-

For the whole class-

- [Plastic world globe](#)
- Clear plastic cup
- Water in a larger container to pour into the cup
- Eyedropper/pipette

["Water for Wheaties?" PowerPoint presentation](#)

Explore:

["Water for Wheaties?" PowerPoint presentation](#)

Explain:

["Water for Wheaties?" PowerPoint presentation](#)

[GPM Precipitation Data to Compare/Contrast resource sheet](#) to use in Project Teams

Copies of these resource sheets for each member of the "Expert Group"

It is best to have students access these electronically as some of them as hyperlinks which contain short videos with sound. If you don't have enough computers for each student, they could cluster around one computer to watch the embedded videos.

"Expert Group" Student Resource Sheets-

- [Growing Wheat](#)
- [Weather and Climate in Sargodha, Pakistan](#)
- [Weather and Climate in Gypsum, Kansas](#)
- [Freshwater Resources in Pakistan](#)
- [Notetaking Organizer](#) (for each student to use in Expert Group)

Optional: a print copy of [Interview with Faisal Hossain](#) (You may decide to have students read this on the projector as a group, or have each student have their own copy.)

Global Precipitation Measurement Mission

Evaluate:

[“Water for Wheaties?” PowerPoint presentation](#)

[Water for Wheaties rubric](#): one copy for each student or small group (Teacher can decide if evaluation projects will be completed by individual students or in small groups.) The teacher should review the rubric and consider what types of projects (posters, PPT presentations, comics, skits, video product, etc. using a [Universal Design for Learning](#) approach)

Extend:

[“Water for Wheaties?” PowerPoint presentation](#)

Engage:

The purpose of the activities in this section are to begin to make students aware of the need for freshwater resources for agriculture. They begin by brainstorming about the foods they eat which are grown by farmers, and then move into understanding that farmers need freshwater to grow crops and raise animals.

Key Concept: Farmers need water to grow crops.

Ask each student to make a list of the things that he/she had to eat yesterday. Tell them to put a star by the things that needed to be grown by farmers. Have students share their list with a partner and circle items on their lists which include ingredients that originally came from farms. (slide 2)

As a class, think about what farmers need to have in order to grow their crops. Make a class list of the different things that are essential to growing food to meet the needs of people around the world. (slide 3)

Key Concept: Most of Earth’s water is salt water. Less than 2.5% of Earth’s water is freshwater. Farmers need freshwater resources.

Look at a globe and ask how much of Earth’s surface is covered by water. [Globe activity](#) to predict how much of Earth is covered by water. (slide 4)

Watch the video, [“Show Me the Water”](#). (slide 5)

Discuss the questions on slide 6 to help frame students’ understanding about the usage of freshwater resources by farmers around the world. Guide students to compare and contrast how much water is used by developing countries and the U.S. for agriculture usage (developing countries- about 70% compared to US about 31

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%) as well as the difference between irrigating crops and allowing precipitation to water them. This will be reinforced later as well. (slide 6)

Read the article, "[Precious Freshness](#)" and use the information to answer the questions as a class on slide 7. The class can read this article as a class or students can have paper copies or read electronically on their own (slide 7)

Explore:

Now the students will begin to think more specifically about the ways in which freshwater resources are used around the world. They will begin to learn about wheat and its importance in our diet. Before they begin their "Expert Group" research, they will also learn the difference between having precipitation water crops and needing to irrigate the crops when there isn't adequate precipitation.

Key Concept: Watering crops by irrigating versus having them watered by precipitation

Help guide the students to understand the difference between having crops irrigated versus having enough precipitation to water them adequately. (slide 8)

Key Concept: The importance of wheat in our diets

Have students think about the many foods they eat that include wheat. (slide 9)

Explain:

Now the students have some common background information and are ready to start working in their "Expert Groups". Divide the class into four small groups, each of whom will be responsible for becoming experts on one of these topics:

- [Growing Wheat](#)
- [Weather and Climate in Sargodha, Pakistan](#)
- [Weather and Climate in Gypsum, Kansas](#)
- [Pakistan's Freshwater Resources](#)

Have each student take notes on the [Notetaking Organizer](#) to help them have notes to refer to when they get together in their Project Team. Each Project Team will consist of an expert from each group- and thus will be composed of 4 students.

A copy of the [GPM Precipitation Data to Compare/Contrast](#) for each Project Team (This will be much more meaningful if it can be printed in color. One for the team of four should be fine)

Global Precipitation Measurement Mission

Key Concept: Understand the purpose of the Expert Groups and Project Teams

Explain to the students that they will work in smaller “Expert Groups” in order to become knowledgeable about one topic. This is how scientists and engineers work when they are working collaboratively on a project. They have different areas of expertise and get together in their “working groups” to build their common knowledge. (slide 10)

For this activity, they will focus on two different wheat growing regions in the world. One of these is in Kansas and the other is in Pakistan, which is a developing country. (slide 11)

After they work with their Expert Group and take notes and discuss their topic, they will assemble into different Project Teams. (slide 12)

Students will review the questions that they will be focusing on within each expert group to get a feel for the broader picture. (slide 13)

Key Concept: NASA has a satellite mission that measures global precipitation.

The Global Precipitation Measurement (GPM) mission is a NASA satellite mission that is able to measure the precipitation as it falls from the clouds to the ground. (slide 14)

Have students learn about this mission by watching “[For Good Measure](#)”. Clicking on the image will open the link that has the video. The video is 2 minutes long, and will play more smoothly if you have it open and ready to go or download it ahead of time. (slide 15)

Key Concept: Unpacking data from GPM to answer questions in Project Teams

Give the students the directions for what they will do when they break into “Project Teams”. These will be small teams of 4, which will include an expert from the different teams in order to be able to share their collective expertise as they attempt to answer a few key questions while looking at GPM data. (slide 16)

Take a minute to review the two locations that they will be looking at GPM’s precipitation data to try to determine whether there is enough precipitation to water the wheat crops during each location’s wheat growing season, or if they will also need to use irrigation methods. (slide 17)

The data that students are looking at is what is known as “IMERG” data. IMERG data is composed of precipitation estimates from combining microwave data from the

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GMI, TMI, and other partner instruments. You can learn more about this data [here](#), but the students may simply need to know that this is data that has been collected from the GPM mission. If you should want to find the IMERG monthly data for your school location, you can follow the directions [here](#) and obtain that data. That might be an interesting activity to do with the class after they have looked at the IMERG data for the two locations we are working with in this lesson.

Assign one member of each Expert Group to a Project Team, which will result in many small Project Teams with 4 members in each team. Allow them a few minutes to look over the data in their Project Team. You may want to consider using [these](#) data analysis resources from *My NASA Data* with your students to help them unpack what they are looking at with the interannual time series data graphs. If you have time, preparing the [graph cubes](#) ahead of time will enable students to interact with the graphs and help them to unpack the information in a more constructivist manner. There are accompanying student capture sheets that are scaffolded and thus ensure that all students can access the content (Universal Design for Learning).

After they have had enough time to begin to unpack the graphs, **use slides 18 and 19** to ensure they are able to do the following:

- Understand that time is being shown on the x-axis using different colored lines. Each line represents a season- “DJF- December, January, February” and so on.
- Understand that the y-axis is showing how much precipitation was measured in *mm* per month (or estimated as it is using remotely sensed data).
- You might show them this short video (2:39) entitled “[Getting the Big Picture](#)” to help them understand how we are able to collect remotely sensed data from space to help us make measurements, or estimates, of Earth data. This is also suggested in the Extend section. You can use slide 29 to help frame their understanding, and click on the image on slide 30 if you decide to show the video here.)

Leave the questions on **slide 20** and circulate to assist Project Teams as necessary.

They may find that using highlighters is helpful to figure out which data to look at for each location. For example, wheat growing season in Kansas (this information is in the Weather and Climate in Gypsum, Kansas resource) is fairly long. Wheat is planted in the fall, becomes dormant in the winter, and grows in the spring and is harvested in June and July. Thus, the growing season is longer, but the most water will be needed during the spring and early summer. The students could use their highlighters and find the lines that show MAM (March-April-May) as well as JJA (June-July-August). It will not be possible to be exact with this data, but they can be looking for patterns and trends in the data. They may also need some assistance in

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finding and highlighting the important information that they will need to help them answer their Project Team questions as they look through their Expert Group resources.

They will also need to convert the mm units to cm units- easy enough with the metric system as they just divide by 10- to see if there is enough precipitation to grow wheat without needing to use other water to irrigate the wheat crops. (from the “[Growing Wheat](#)” resource- they will note that growing wheat requires between 31-38 cm of precipitation, which will be 310 -380 mm)

From time to time, you may want to use [slides 18 and 19](#) to point out important information or have students assist others in interpreting the data.

Once students have had time to work in their Project Teams and you determine it is time to come together as a class and share in their answers, bring the class back together to answer the questions on [slide 20](#) together. Help them use [argumentation strategies](#) to come to a class consensus on the answers.

Key Concept- Using technology to reduce the amount of freshwater resources needed in Pakistan for growing wheat

Now students are ready to use what they have learned to consider some possible ways in which technologies could be used to solve a real-world problem, that of limited freshwater resources in Pakistan. Help them to begin this process by showing them [slide 21](#) and having them brainstorm what is happening in this picture.

After they have thought about what was happening in the first picture, show them [slide 22](#) as it will give them additional information to use to try to figure out how

Key Concept- Meet Faisal Hossain and learn about his STEM-related career

Faisal Hossain is a professor who teaches civil and environmental engineering at the University of Washington in Washington state. He uses the data from GPM and other NASA satellite missions to help wheat farmers in Pakistan. The farmers get text messages every day letting them know whether or not they should water their wheat crops. Students can “meet him” by clicking on his picture and opening the link that has a short video interview with him on [slide 23](#).

Have students read about his work in the resource: [Interview with Faisal Hossain](#). ([slide 24](#)) You can show this document on the large screen and/or have each student have their own printed copy.

Global Precipitation Measurement Mission

As students read the interview, have them use the questions on **slide 25** to guide their reading. When they finish, use **slide 26** to help them generate some questions they have about his career and work.

Here are some resources to learn more about the work Faisal is doing to reduce the use of freshwater resources using technology. Many are too complex for third grade students, but you might find portions of this information useful for yourself and your students.

- [Growing More with Less: Smart Tech Solutions to Feed the World](#) (video presentation by Faisal Hossain)
- [Professor Faisal Hossain modernizes irrigation to feed the masses](#) (article from The Daily with many links to more information)
- [A collection of videos by Faisal Hossain](#)

Evaluate:

Key Concept: Understand that most careers require us to communicate our findings to others. This is true for scientists and engineers as well.

Help students to understand that most careers require that people have a way to communicate what they learn to others. This is true for scientists and engineers as well. Use **slide 27** to review the scientific research process and see where “Present Findings” falls within the scientific research process.

Key Concept: Understand the expectations for the project

Use **slide 28** to frame the expectations for the content the students will include in their final project. This could be completed as an in class or homework assignment. Based on the needs of your students and your classroom environment, you can determine whether the projects will be completed individually or in small groups. The [rubric](#) includes four focal areas: oral presentation showing knowledge of topic; organization showing timely and appropriate completion of project; content showing quality of information including use of facts and details; and research showing use of facts versus opinion. The teacher may of course modify this rubric to meet the unique needs of their learners.

Elaborate/Extend:

Key Concept- NASA Earth observing missions help us understand our home planet
Click on the image on **slide 29** to open the link that has a short video entitled “Why Does NASA Study Earth?”. This video is very short (1:52) and uses drawings to explain why and how NASA Earth observing satellites help us learn about Earth.

Global Precipitation Measurement Mission

Students may be curious about how satellites are able to measure environmental variables like precipitation, humidity, and surface temperature. Use [slides 30 and 31](#) to help them understand remote sensing. You might want to download the video ahead of time to ensure proper buffering. The video, "[Getting the Big Picture](#)" is 02:39 long.

Key Concept: Saving Freshwater Resources

[Slide 32](#) has a link to the EPA's "[WaterSense](#)" website with activities and information for students and teachers.

Show students [slide 33](#) and have them read "[Earth's Water Delivery: No Passport Required](#)" to learn more about Earth's freshwater resources and how they are inequitably distributed around the world. Students could have their own copies or read the article as a class on the projector screen.

Additional Resources:

There are more resources you and the students might want to explore on [slide 34](#). You may also want to explore the resources in GPM's "Precipitation Education" [website](#), as there are a rich array of educational resources on this website.

Credits:

Special thanks to Faisal Hossain and the "Pakistan Council of Research in Water Resources" (<http://www.pcrwr.gov.pk>) for contributing to this work.